



Thursday, November 15, 2012

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## Crime Stories of the Century

### The awful acts of the past 100 years forced America to look at itself in the mirror

*By Angie Cannon*

Posted 11/28/99

We are at once disgusted and fascinated by crime. First, we avert our eyes. Then we reach for the newspapers with their grisly headlines and stare for hours at our televisions as the accused villains go on trial. Every decade, it seems, produces a "crime of the century." As E. L. Doctorow noted in *Ragtime*, headline writers way back in 1906 had already anointed the murder of renowned architect Stanford White the "Crime of the Century," even though there were still 94 more years to go.

We cling to each detail of these dramas. The tantalizing tidbits--the color of the sultry murder victim's nightgown, whether it was a foggy night or cruelly hot--make the unimaginable imaginable. "We want anything that would take us out of the boredom of everyday life," says Colin Wilson, a bestselling British crime writer.

But even more, we want to know how the unspeakable acts were committed, to convince ourselves that we're immune from the same wretched fate--or perhaps to reassure ourselves that we're incapable of such heinous behavior. Ann Rule is a popular true-crime writer who worked alongside Ted Bundy at Seattle's Crisis Clinic before he went on his infamous killing spree. "Some people will put their heads in the sand," Rule says, "while others want to look evil right in the eye, as if the more they know, the safer they will be."

It is the unknowable face of evil, perhaps, that so compels. A deranged stalker--charismatic, deceptively attractive--kills a string of young women, all with long, dark hair. A workaday laborer targets young boys, burying their bodies one next to the other under his house. Why?

As time goes by. Criminal acts tell us much about the times in which they were committed, the mores of the day illuminated by their violation. "If you look back at the trials of the centuries," says historian Roger Lane, author of *Murder in America*, "all of them are telling us something specifically about our society at that point in time." Gary LaFree, a University

of New Mexico criminology professor, attributes a crime surge in the first three decades of the 20th century to unemployment and labor unrest, Prohibition, and a questioning of middle-class values during the 1920s. But after World War II, crime dropped. The family structure was stable--TV's Ozzie and Harriet were the model in the 1950s. The U.S. economy was strong. So was respect for the law. "We had just won a war with important ethical and moral overtones," says LaFree. "There was trust in the government and political system."

For a time, the violation of that trust captured the criminal imagination. Then society's pillars began to crumble. Divorces increased; families unraveled. Race riots and protests against the war in Vietnam broke out across the nation. Crime stayed high during the 1970s and 1980s, but demographic changes and widespread prosperity reduced crime in the 1990s to the lowest level since World War II.

And in the new millennium? "Oklahoma City, I'm afraid, is the future," says Lane. "At the end of this American century and the beginning of the next, all the world's grievances center on Uncle Sam." Sadly, there will be many more "crimes of the century."

## THE 1900S

### When Harry shot Stanford

By 1906, the Victorian era was over, but it was still a strait-laced time. Even so, people couldn't get enough of a juicy sex story, especially one about the rich and famous. Stanford White was the country's leading architect, a celebrated visionary and man about town. White designed splendid homes and grand buildings. But he was also a cad who had affairs with young showgirls and threw wild bashes with women popping out of huge pies.

On June 25, White was shot three times by Pittsburgh railroad scion Harry Thaw in front of dozens of theatergoers watching the musical *Mamzelle Champagne* on the roof of Madison Square Garden, which White had designed. "You deserve this," Thaw cried angrily, after pulling the trigger. "You have ruined my wife." Some 20 years younger than White, Thaw was insanely jealous of the 54-year-old architect. Five years earlier, White had seduced Evelyn Nesbit, the comely chorus girl Thaw eventually wed. In seducing the fetching 16-year-old, White had her pose half-naked in a kimono and slipped her a glass of spiked champagne in a mirrored room in his apartment.

Thaw's revenge, then, was justified, at least in his mind. But he was no Prince Charming. A

notorious playboy, he was known for whipping girls in a room he rented in a brothel. He whipped Nesbit, too, before they were married. The details tumbled out at the trial, the public's thirst unslaked by the endless stream of tawdriness. Thaw, meanwhile, seemed unconcerned, passing the days in his Tombs prison cell munching squab and sipping champagne from Delmonico's restaurant.

The newspapers had a field day. At the trial, Thaw's lawyer, Delphin Delmas, told the jury his client suffered from "dementia Americana," a form of insanity "that persuades an American that whoever violates the sanctity of his home or the purity of his wife or daughter has forfeited the protection of the laws of this state." The trial ended with a hung jury. A year later, Delmas tried another tack, saying Thaw was just plain crazy. The second jury bought it, finding Thaw not guilty by reason of insanity. The onetime playboy was shipped off to an asylum, but he escaped a few years later, fled to Canada, and was finally returned to New York to face conspiracy charges for the escape. After two trials, he was acquitted, and a jury pronounced him sane in July 1915. Harry Thaw was a free man. He died in 1947. Twenty years later, facing her own death, Evelyn Nesbit made a pronouncement. Stanford White, she said, had been her true love all along.

## THE 1910S

### The ballad of Joe Hill

Things couldn't have been better--for the rich. The economy was roaring. Corporations were fat and happy. But workers felt left out of the good time. Soon they began striking. Corporate chieftains responded swiftly. Company goons and, often, cops weighed in with fists and clubs.

Enter Joe Hill. A member of the Industrial Workers of the World, Hill had drifted from job to job, garnering a small measure of fame as an IWW songwriter. Around 10 p.m. on Jan. 10, 1914, two men strolled into the Salt Lake City grocery of John G. Morrison and fatally shot him and his son. Three days later, Hill was arrested. The prosecution's case was thin, based on Hill's having been treated by a doctor for a gunshot wound shortly after the killings. Hill insisted he was innocent. He had been shot, he said, during a spat over a woman. The explanation didn't wash: A jury convicted Hill, and he was sentenced to die.

It was never clear that his union membership played a role in his conviction, but the IWW turned Hill into a martyr for the cause. Messages of support poured in from around the

world. Even President Woodrow Wilson asked that Hill be spared--to no avail. On Nov. 19, 1915, Joe Hill was shot in the heart by a five-man firing squad. Just before his execution, Hill wrote to union leader Big Bill Haywood: "Don't waste any time mourning--organize!"

Haywood knew a thing or two about organizing--and about trouble. In 1907, he was tried for allegedly having ordered the assassination of former Idaho Gov. Frank Steunenberg, who was despised by labor for having called in federal troops to quell union violence. Steunenberg was blown to bits by a bomb. Haywood was acquitted of the crime after his lawyer, Clarence Darrow, delivered an 11-hour closing argument that left some in the courtroom weeping.

In the end, though, it was the itinerant songwriter, not the flamboyant union boss, who was most remembered. In 1925, a young poet named Alfred Hayes wrote the ballad, "I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night." It became a classic, popularized by Joan Baez and Pete Seeger.

## THE 1920S

### St. Valentine's Day Massacre

On the morning of Feb. 14, 1929, neighbors heard loud blasts coming from a garage at 2122 N. Clark Street in Chicago. They thought it was construction drilling. When Highball, the German shepherd inside the garage, barked mournfully, a neighbor went to investigate. "The place is full of dead men!" the man cried. Thus was discovered what forever after would be known as the St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

The garage was the headquarters of George "Bugs" Moran. It was there, during Prohibition, that the gangster received crates of illegal hooch, doling it out to speak-easies around the Windy City. Moran wasn't in the garage when the bullets started to fly, but afterward, when he was asked who had ordered the hit, he yelled: "Only Capone kills like that!"

By then, Al Capone had eliminated almost all his rivals, except his archenemy Moran. The feud between the two was mortal. Moran once tried to knock off Capone by slipping prussic acid into his soup.

It was personal, but it was also about money--big money. Prohibition began on Jan. 16, 1920. Banning booze, it was believed, would cure all the country's social ills. Many Americans didn't see it that way, and they turned to sipping bathtub gin and frequenting

speakeasies. People hid liquor in hip flasks, fake books, and hollow canes, and beneath babies in carriages. Some 200,000 speakeasies sprouted across the nation, requiring huge bootleg operations.

That's where Capone came in. A sixth-grade dropout who once beat up his teacher, he became the nation's most notorious gangster, with an army of maybe a thousand henchmen. Nicknamed "Scarface" after his left cheek was slashed in a fight over a girl, Capone once boasted: "I own the police!"

He wasn't kidding. On that fateful Valentine's Day, author Jay Robert Nash says, Capone's men, some dressed as cops, staged a bogus police raid on Bugs Moran's garage. "I'm gonna send Moran a Valentine he will never forget," Capone reportedly vowed. And he did. There were seven men in the garage at 10:30 that morning. Capone's boys lined them up against a wall. Evidently thinking the "police" were about to search them, the men complied. Capone's soldiers opened up with submachine guns.

Until then, the country romanticized gangsters. The massacre on Clark Street changed that. People were shocked by the brutality. President Herbert Hoover wanted Capone behind bars. It took a few years, but the feds finally nailed him--not for bootlegging or murder but on a tax beef. Scarface wound up doing 11 years.

## THE 1930S

### The Lindbergh baby

On March 1, 1932, Charles Lindbergh Jr., the beloved 20-month-old son of the flying ace, was put to bed, as usual, at 7:30 p.m. But when a nurse checked on the blond, curly-haired boy at 10 p.m., his crib was empty, the window to his second-floor bedroom open. Police found a ransom note on the sill. Whoever took the child wanted \$50,000 to bring him back.

The kidnapping took place during a bleak time. The country was broke. People peddled apples in the streets. Bread lines sprang up. So hated were the banks that stickup men like John Dillinger were admired. There was no sympathy for a greedy kidnapper, though. What kind of person would steal away in the night with a baby?

Charles Lindbergh paid the \$50,000 ransom, the money delivered in marked bills. In return he received a note: The baby was on a boat near Martha's Vineyard. That was a lie. On May

12, the baby's body was found in the woods less than 5 miles from the Lindbergh house. He had a fractured skull and a hole in his forehead the size of a quarter. Police believe the boy died the night he was kidnapped.

It would take time--more than two years--but eventually the marked bills turned up. Detectives arrested a Bronx carpenter, Bruno Richard Hauptmann, in September 1934. When they searched the German immigrant's modest house, they found thousands of dollars in the marked bills. After a circuslike trial, Hauptmann was found guilty. On April 3, 1936, he was sent to the electric chair at the state prison in Trenton, N.J., and was executed.

## THE 1940S

### The Rosenberg spy case

Well before Joe McCarthy, but after Winston Churchill christened the Cold War, America was aflame with talk of spies. The Soviet Union was gobbling up Europe. Moscow and Washington were on pins and needles. In the summer of 1949, the Soviets detonated their first atomic bomb. A year later, communist North Korea stormed into South Korea. America, once again, was at war.

And then the Rosenbergs were arrested. Julius was an engineer by training who ran a struggling small machine shop in New York City with his brother-in-law, David Greenglass; Ethel cared for their two sons, 3 and 7. The Rosenbergs were tripped up by others' arrests, but their chief accuser was Greenglass, a small-fish spy who worked on the American atomic bomb project at Los Alamos and fingered his relatives to save himself. Greenglass claimed Julius Rosenberg, a Communist, had recruited him to gather atomic secrets.

The FBI arrested Julius in July 1950; Ethel was arrested a month later. Their trial began on March 6, 1951. The Rosenbergs insisted they were innocent--although government documents declassified in 1995 would confirm Julius was indeed a Soviet spy. In the end, both were found guilty and sentenced to death, a severe punishment for espionage, especially since the Soviet Union had been a wartime ally. The Rosenbergs were Jewish, and there was speculation that the presiding judge and a prosecutor, also both Jewish, went overboard to prove Jews were as patriotic and anti-Communist as the rest of the country. Cries for mercy poured in from around the world; the nation split between those pleading for their lives and those desperate to see the Rosenbergs die for treason. Many believed the sentence was particularly harsh for Ethel, against whom there was scant evidence. There

were demonstrations right up until the moment that the Rosenbergs were executed at Sing Sing Prison on June 19, 1953. She was 37; he was 35. Greenglass got 15 years in prison.

## THE 1950S

### The lynching of Emmett Till

In the hot summer of 1955, Emmett Till, a 14-year-old black boy from Chicago, went to visit relatives near the tiny town of Money, Miss. Before he left Chicago, his mother kissed him goodbye and warned him to be careful. The South wasn't Chicago, she said. On the evening of August 24, friends urged him to talk to a white woman in a small grocery store. Carolyn Bryant said the boy grabbed her hand and said, "How about a date, baby?" and gave her a wolf whistle. Others said he sometimes whistled to cope with a speech defect.

Roy Bryant considered it an affront to his wife. A few nights later, he and his half brother, J. W. Milam, kidnapped Till from his relatives' sharecropper home. The two men savagely beat him, shot him behind his ear, and then threw him in the Tallahatchie River. The boy's body was found several days later with his feet and legs sticking out of the water and a 150-pound cotton gin fan tied around his neck with a piece of barbed wire. A Mississippi sheriff said it appeared that Till's head had been struck with an ax because "it went too deep to be anything else." The two men were charged with the slaying.

These were bitter times in the South. There were threats, bombings, and killings to pressure blacks to move north. But it was also a time of important social change. In 1954, the Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education*, outlawing segregation in public schools. In December 1955, Rosa Parks, a black seamstress, was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man in Montgomery, Ala., prompting the town's black leaders, including a young preacher named Martin Luther King Jr., to organize a bus boycott.

"The Till case galvanized the country," says Georgia Rep. John Lewis, a civil rights pioneer beaten by state troopers in Selma, Ala., during a 1965 march. "A lot of us young black students in the South later on, we weren't sitting in just for ourselves--we were sitting in for Emmett Till. We went on Freedom Rides for Emmett Till."

After deliberating for only one hour and seven minutes, the all-white, all-male jury acquitted Bryant and Milam, stunning the rest of the world. After their acquittal, the pair sold their story to *Look* magazine for \$4,000. Milam recalled saying: "Chicago boy, I'm tired

of 'em sending your kind down here to stir up trouble. Goddamn you, I'm going to make an example of you."

On Chicago's South Side, some 1,700 people filled the church where Till's body was placed on view. Another 15,000 to 50,000 reportedly had filed past his coffin the night before at a funeral home. His mother had overruled undertakers and insisted on an open casket so others could "see what they did to my boy."

## THE 1960S

### Charles Manson, psycho killer

A decade that began by promising to carry on the calm prosperity of the 1950s instead became a caldron of violence and turmoil. The culture was shattered by gunfire with the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. At the same time, body bags from Vietnam were piling up from a war that was tearing the nation apart. As deadly race riots charred cities across the country and antiwar protests became increasingly violent, people began to worry that America was spinning out of control. Then came a crime that seemed to confirm those fears by bringing together so many of the social pathologies of the moment. In her book about the era, *The White Album*, Joan Didion wrote, "Many people I know in Los Angeles believe that the Sixties ended abruptly on Aug. 9, 1969 . . . and in a sense that is true." That was the day a housekeeper reported for work at film director Roman Polanski's home in the Hollywood hills and found five bodies, slashed and bloodied. Slain were Polanski's young wife, actress Sharon Tate, 8 1/2 months pregnant; her friends, Abigail Folger, the heiress of the Folger coffee fortune, and her playboy boyfriend, Voytek Frykowski; Jay Sebring, a well-known hairstylist who lived in Hollywood's fast lane; and Steve Parent, a young man in the wrong place at the wrong time. They had been beaten and stabbed dozens of times. The word "PIG" was scrawled in blood on the front door. The next night, Leno LaBianca, the owner of a grocery chain, and his wife, Rosemary, were found beaten and stabbed in their home east of Beverly Hills. Again, mysterious words in blood: "DEATH TO PIGS RISE" and, misspelled, "HEALTER SKELTER."

Police still had no suspects two months later when a woman in a Los Angeles jail boasted to a cellmate about her "family's" murderous ways. It pointed cops to a man in custody for car theft: Charles Manson.



Manson was the illegitimate son of a 16-year-old girl. He bounced around from relatives to foster homes to reform schools, robbing at gunpoint by age 13. He married twice, divorced twice, and had at least two children. By the time he was released from a federal prison in Washington State in 1967 for forging government checks, he had spent 17 of his 32 years in institutions. He moved to the counterculture capital, San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, where he began recruiting his "family" of mostly young women from well-off but troubled families. The wild-eyed Manson used sex to control his flock, who followed him like sheep. Eventually, he took his "family" to live on an old movie set in the mountains north of Los Angeles. A twisted motive for the Tate-LaBianca murders emerged: to leave the impression that blacks had committed them, thus igniting a race war that Manson believed would destroy the country, paving the way for his "family" to take over. He took his cues from what he believed were hidden messages in Beatles' songs, notably "Helter Skelter."

After a nine-month trial, Manson and three of his acolytes were convicted; a fifth would be convicted later. All were sentenced to death, but their sentences were commuted to life in prison after the California Supreme Court tossed out capital punishment in 1972. Vincent Bugliosi, who prosecuted the Manson case, says it still resonates because it's so "incredibly far out. . . . If this were fiction you would throw it away after 10 pages. " Yet the truth is inescapable. As Bugliosi admits: "Manson has become a metaphor for evil."

## THE 1970S

### A killer called 'Son of Sam'

He was a stocky, cherubic-faced postal clerk who seemed like just another harmless, goofy guy. Yet he terrorized New York City for more than a year, killing six young people and wounding seven with a .44-caliber Charter Arms Bulldog revolver. When police finally arrested him on Aug. 10, 1977, David Berkowitz was unfazed. "Well, you've got me," he shrugged. And with that, the "Son of Sam" siege that had petrified normally jaded New Yorkers was over.

Berkowitz was the epitome of a phenomenon that became all too familiar in the edgy, uneasy '70s: serial killers. Besides the 24-year-old Berkowitz, there was Ted Bundy, the suave and handsome onetime law student from Washington State, who crisscrossed the country charming, then murdering an estimated 36 to more than 100 young women, including several in a Chi Omega sorority in Florida. There was John Wayne Gacy, the burly contractor who performed as a clown at children's parties and sexually abused, then killed

33 young men and boys, burying most of them in the crawlspace under his tidy, yellow brick house in a Chicago suburb. And there was the "Hillside Strangler" in California, who turned out to be two cousins, Angelo Buono and Kenneth Bianchi, who lured women into their cars by pretending to be undercover cops--and then strangled at least 10 of them.

Berkowitz struck randomly at night or in the predawn hours, transforming traditionally indifferent New Yorkers into a city of 8 million panic-stricken people. Teens gave up favorite lovers' lane spots. Some women cut their hair, wore hats to hide it, or routinely wore it up, because he seemed to favor women with long, brown hair. "He was a fat, lumpy, little boy, and he shot young women in their cars when they weren't looking," says *Newsday* columnist Jimmy Breslin, who covered the story for the *Daily News*.

Detectives finally caught Berkowitz after tracing a ticket on a cream-colored Ford Galaxy sedan parked illegally at a fire hydrant near his last shooting in Brooklyn to his Yonkers apartment building. When they found the car outside Berkowitz's suburban flat, they looked inside and saw a machine gun poking out of a sack and a letter with printing similar to other writings from the mysterious killer, who had identified himself as the Son of Sam. Berkowitz told police that he received "commands" from a man named Sam who lived 6,000 years ago and spoke to him through a dog. Police believed that Berkowitz was obsessed with a neighbor named Sam, who had a dog. After pleading guilty, Berkowitz was sentenced to 25 years to life in prison for each of the six slayings.

## 1980s

### Jeffrey Dahmer, cannibal

He was a former chocolate factory worker with a fetish for flesh. In his putrid, one-bedroom apartment in Milwaukee, he saved painted skulls and severed heads, including one stashed in the fridge next to a box of baking soda. He had a kettle and a freezer of body parts. He stored torsos in a vat of acid. He drilled holes in his victims' heads and had sex with dead bodies. He chewed on body parts, once using Crisco and meat tenderizer on a biceps. Over 13 years, mostly through the excessive 1980s, Jeffrey Dahmer, alone in his poisoned world, was monstrous, repulsive, depraved. But the most frightening thing about Dahmer is what he was not: insane. He was objectively judged to be sane. He did what he did with his wits intact." He was a man who made a decision that he would satisfy himself," says E. Michael McCann, the Milwaukee district attorney who put Dahmer away in 1992. "He liked sex with dead bodies. It was the ultimate in self-indulgence."

In an interview with NBC's Dateline in March 1994, Dahmer said lust drove him to lure his victims, most of them black and gay, from bars, bus stops, and shopping malls, to his apartment, where he drugged, strangled, and dismembered them. "Once it happened the first time, it just seemed like it had control of my life from there on in," he said. "The killing was just a means to an end. That was the least satisfactory part. I didn't enjoy doing that. That's why I tried to create living zombies with . . . acid and the drill."

His killing spree started in 1978 with an 18-year-old hitchhiker whom Dahmer met and brought home for a few beers. Dahmer, who had just graduated from high school, battered him with a barbell, cut up the body, and scattered the crushed bones behind his parents' house. By the time he was arrested on July 22, 1991, after a man he had handcuffed escaped from his apartment and flagged down a police car, Dahmer had killed 17 men and boys. He confessed, saying simply, "I carried it too far, that's for sure."

The only issue at his 1992 trial was whether to accept his plea that he was criminally insane--and therefore not responsible for his revolting actions. Dr. Park Dietz, a respected California forensic psychiatrist, determined that he was not insane. "Dahmer was quiet, introverted, and performed his job pretty well until he finally fell asleep and couldn't do his work because he couldn't keep up with his nighttime dastardly deeds," says prosecutor McCann.

Dahmer was serving 16 consecutive life terms when inmates beat him to death in a prison bathroom in November 1994. Two years later, a businessman offered more than \$400,000 to buy his implements--the refrigerator, the vats, the drills, the saws--to prevent a public auction. They were secretly buried.

## THE 1990S

### The O. J. Simpson case

It was a foggy June night in 1994 when Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ron Goldman were slashed to death outside her Brentwood, Calif., condo. There were no witnesses, but many clues: bloody shoe prints and glove, a knit cap. When police later noticed cuts on the left hand of Nicole's estranged husband, O. J. Simpson, it started a chain of events that's still reverberating.

It turned out that a trail of blood drops leading away from the bodies appeared to match the

mighty former football player's blood type. Detective Mark Fuhrman told other cops that he had found the mate to the bloody glove at Simpson's posh Brentwood mansion. DNA experts testified that there was blood from the victims at Simpson's house and in the white Ford Bronco in which he had led police on a surreal televised freeway chase after the murders. And prosecutors showed he had a history of slapping his wife around.

The 1990s have seen terrorism in the United States--at the World Trade Center and at the federal office building in Oklahoma City. It has also been a time when angry, alienated boys opened fire on classmates in Columbine High and other schools. But it was the Simpson case--a tangled tale of money, power, celebrity, race, domestic abuse, media madness--that captured America's perverse fascination with the famous. It started as a macabre parlor game that, thanks to cameras in the courtroom, everyone could play. But as the case evolved, it became a racially tinged referendum on the American justice system.

"What made it unusual was O.J.," says Vincent Bugliosi, the former Los Angeles prosecutor who wrote a book about the case. "The murder was very garden-variety." The football star turned Hertz pitchman hired a colorful cadre of high-priced legal talent dubbed the "Dream Team." The televised 13-month trial, presided over by Superior Court Judge Lance Ito, was the most widely watched criminal proceeding in history. Simpson's lawyers accused the police of bungling the investigation. Forensic experts pointed to sloppiness that could have compromised blood samples; the bloody glove didn't seem to fit; Fuhrman was a disastrous witness.

The jury deliberated for only a few hours before acquitting Simpson. A civil jury later disagreed, finding Simpson liable for both deaths and ordering him to cough up \$33.5 million in damages. He sold his mansion, lost his Heisman trophy, and now lives not far from the murder scene with his and Nicole's two children. Did he get away with murder? That's the question of the century.

## THE NEXT CENTURY

### Millennial madness?

It's hard to say where things are going in the new millennium. Violent crime has declined steadily, but the experts believe it's best to hold off popping the champagne for now. They worry that the reasons for the drop could shift the other way. Will the economy remain strong? Is there another deadly menace on the horizon, like crack during the 1980s? Might

crime surge because of the massive welfare overhaul?

In looking back at the past 100 years, one thing stands out: Man's capacity for cruelty seems fairly constant. In fact, some experts note that the extraordinarily brutal crimes--such as Charles Manson's blood bath, Son of Sam and his spinoffs--appear to have increased since World War II. "The crimes that scare us most--those by strangers--are on the rise: serial killings and mass killings," says historian Roger Lane. As the millennium closes, it seems there are more and more random assaults on the anchors of American life: offices, schools, post offices. Some fear terrorism, too, is the wave of the future--the targeting of American fortresses by crazed militia groups or by international madmen seeking redress with powerful bombs. Crime experts worry that someday we might see the frightening brand of overseas terrorism that has so far eluded us: suicidal fanatics bent on destruction.

Such crimes--random, huge, paralyzing--may make us nostalgic for the spectacles of this century's early years, like the steamy love triangle of Stanford White. They conjure an age when big crimes were more soap opera than suffering.

With Kate V. Forsyth

This story appears in the December 6, 1999 print edition of U.S. News & World Report.

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